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# VOIDS OF MELANCHOLY

**When the images of earth cling too tightly to memory, when the call of happiness becomes too insistent, it happens that melancholy rises in a mans heart.<sup>1</sup>**

**Albert Camus**

I refer to these 'images of earth' as being our objects of desire, not solidified as real objects, but rather as voids of lament and yearning where real objects might exist.

Basic emotions are object driven. Fear, terror and rage are active emotions and demand a particular type of behaviour towards an object. In an effort to reduce such tension we may adopt either active or passive means of dealing with a problem, which is in essence, basically deferral or avoidance.

We may adopt a child-like demand for the intrusion of some magical act which will hopefully remove the undesirable burden and take away the pain, which would essentially be a passive means of sublimation. Or we could practice basic Freudian deferral and make a pre-meditated decision not to confront the issue. To wilfully defer confrontation is an active and conscious means of refusal. Consciousness tells us we have no need for the object, we act accordingly and this becomes a manipulation of our need to make the object less important, therefore less desirable. We may seek refuge in a variety of distractions adopted consciously or unconsciously, the decision made by our 'will'. An abuse of the use of alcohol, drugs, and excessive licentious erotic behaviour are such examples. If we are unable or incapable of dealing with some turmoil, then our response is mechanistic. It becomes too difficult to confront and our capabilities are reduced rendering it impossible to act in any other way. This mechanistic method is a 'slipping-away' into a condition which automatically denies any possibility of having to use measures of control. A sufferer of a severe depression, hysteria, or a melancholic are subject to this state of inadequacy, or more particularly, are a result of it.

There is a general unwillingness to free the libido from its attachment to the object. To do so would be to acknowledge the investment of energy and libido as being in need of alteration or substitution. Therefore what may arise as a result, is a sublimation of the

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<sup>1</sup> Camus, Albert. On Suicide, p.115.

need to resolve the psychological state by allowing the libido to be absorbed into melancholy. Thus any need for substitution or confrontation is deferred.

In other words; we know we should sensibly act on the loss of the object, but we resist, because to free the libido from that object would be to have to make certain admissions that would question the ego's performance.

It is during this period of mental adjustment to the loss of the object of desire that memories attached to that object are hypercathected. (This is where the opening quote by Camus is particularly relevant.)

In Freud's study of Mourning and Melancholia he cites mourning as a loss which is experienced as a physical, tangible loss, whereas in the instance of melancholia; the "loss is of a more ideal kind".<sup>2</sup>

Although melancholia is in some way related to an object-loss which is withdrawn from consciousness it is more of an impoverishment of the ego. To acknowledge that the loss of an object has taken place, is to infer that the object was actually in our possession. But when the object is no more than an ideal, the sense of that possession is comparatively unreal. ie: The attachments previously held for that object exist in something of virtual state, so the melancholic state is like an inversion of the ego, or a questioning of it. I may ask: "Why have I made this investment when it is not a physical reality? I can't see what I've lost because I never actually had it."

The ego is held to scrutiny. "This is what I am, this is what I want." But when there is in fact nothing in substance, the ego recoils. "It was nothing anyway. I was being naive, unworthy. I deserved it."

The melancholic then is fast becoming self-denigrating and self-reviling of their own apparent naivety. To have believed in, and adhered to, the notion of possession of, and investment in, that object of desire which was not reciprocated to the same degree, is to admit gullibility.

A sense of rejection is experienced both physically and emotionally which is mostly a rejection of the ego's worth. In normal circumstances the libido would have transferred this loss to another object, but in the case of the melancholic:

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<sup>2</sup> Freud, S. Mourning And Melancholia. p.253.

the free libido was not displaced on to another object; it was withdrawn into the ego. There however, it was not employed in any specific way, but served to establish an identification of the ego with the abandoned object.<sup>3</sup>

If the abandoned object is seen to be worthless, and the ego has adopted this characteristic and is malfunctioning, the necessary drive for a healthy self-esteem is most certainly diminished.

An observer may wonder at the apparent willingness to be a subject of such a degrading state of depression, and actually appearing to relish the condition, but the vital clue to this is that the poor state of the ego is refusing nourishment. (In her article on the Abject Julia Kristeva refers to the refusal of nourishment as a reaction against the separation from the mother and a symbolic rejection of the mother's milk.)

The fact that the: "ego can consent to its own destruction"<sup>4</sup> implies that there is an element of sadomasochism involved. The ego and the object become internecine partners in the crime of self-destruction. If melancholy is the result, it is also its own protagonist. It exhibits a certain level of desire in its own existence.

The psychoanalytical theories of Julia Kristeva attribute the condition of melancholia to the unsuccessful separation from the mother, the association of the mother with death, and the inability to develop our own identity, thus hindering the satisfactory entry into the symbolic phase. Kristeva does not fully comply with the 'object- based' theories of Freud and describes the melancholic as experiencing a huge sense of sadness. Not a sadness based on the loss of an object, because she believes, that there is no 'real' object as such, just a vacancy where an object might reside. This vacancy is only filled with sadness which becomes the object substitute.

There is no object for the melancholic, only a sadness as an ersatz of an object.<sup>5</sup>

Melancholy is synonymous with despair, so if there is any sense of desire at all, it is to remain in that state, hence 'desire' itself is never satisfied. Outwardly the melancholic can appear to delight in wallowing in the condition.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. p.258

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. p.261

<sup>5</sup> Lechte, John. Art, Love, and Melancholy in the Work of Julia Kristeva. p.34

Melancholy is manifested in literature and art in varying degrees but generally implies that some loss has occurred.

Albrecht Durer gave melancholy a human form in the engraving of 1514, essentially a winged female form, passively resigned, her head inclined and shielded in despair. She is a shallow symbol of melancholy visibly displaying what we might imagine to be the appearance of a melancholic. We associate her physical disposition with the outward expression of the condition. This is how we are meant to look.

Perhaps in Maurice Blanchot's; 'Madness of the Day' the reader is more successfully transported inside the mentally fixated condition. By his description of internal and pertinent current thoughts, he relays the feeling of his direct experience.

Lechte states that;

we may suppose that the artist tends towards the melancholic pole of the psychical spectrum. Every imaginary artistic work even those geared to provoke a strong emotional response, is executed with a certain detachment.<sup>6</sup>

Given Kristeva's views on the complicit relationship between art and life, it is a quandry that the artist could be detached from the work, but then this possibly occurs as a result of the transference of subjective experience and ideas to the objective through representation. The artist must step outside of their own subjectivity in order to ascertain its objective value.

The camera is a perfect vehicle for 'looking back at life'. It is especially noticable in the early Surrealist photographs which sought to replicate candid fragments direct from life; "moments of lost time, of vanquished customs,"<sup>7</sup> and is overtly demonstrated in the travelogue images of exotic distant lands with fascinating inhabitants.

In looking back at life; "photography has always been fascinated by social heights and lower depths. Documentarists (as distinct from coutiers with cameras) prefer the latter."<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Ibid. p.35.

<sup>7</sup> Sontag, Susan. On Photography. p.54.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p.55.

If I had to place my work within some frame of reference to photographic tradition it would lie somewhere under the loose cover of 'the documentary'. Although the works are highly coloured by emotion, they are nevertheless photographic documents: (implying the necessary presence of the photographer), of a psychological condition: (the objectification of the subjective), in that they record the same place over a period of time. Therefore they are an indexical document, Kristevan in the sense of being integrated with life, of a weeping psychological wound. There is seemingly no resolution to there existence, for that would attempt to finalise the desire which as I have previously referred to as defying satisfaction. (In this respect they bear resemblance to Sisyphus who repeatedly pushes his rock to great heights only to see it roll down to the bottom again.) The photographic surface solidifies the event and represents it as one of impregnability. There is no body, no object as such. Just a thin membrane over the void.

To return to the idea of detachment briefly, it is often noted that in the occurrence of a severe depression, with tendency to suicide, there is a distinct feeling of detachment from the self with this other 'self' as an onlooker. Incessant internal monologues like an echo slightly out of sync, although deep inside, it assumes a voyeuristic position. It may be a conscience but I prefer to think of it as a shadow of the superego telling me to go no further.



# THE DESIRE OF VERTIGO

The full moon of Autumn and I paced one another along the familiar coastline. Snaking around the carpeted curves of the hillside sharply rising from the numerous and intimate coves which were flanked by the coarse, rocky headlands, we lost sight of each other only during the series of musty tunnels which cut through the coal deposits and honey-gold sandstone.

The journey was no more speedy now than it had been when I used to take it as an alternative to hitchhiking. When sometimes I felt vulnerable as a result of prior encounters and had no reserves of tolerance for requests for sexual favours as a form of repayment, or let my distracted imagination describe the cold, gleaming contents of the boot because this driver had proudly indicated he was a butcher by trade.

Even after twenty years the welcoming committee at the destination appeared to be the same cast of extras, greeting their charges with the same nasal intonation rising to a crescendo at the tail end of their sentences, whilst in the throws of robust hugs and handshakes and the obligatory exchange of rancid and waxy lipstick.

A forty minute drive from the station has never ceased to fill me with an incredible sense of apprehension and childlike excitement made possible by a combination of factors. There was the physical and emotional freedom on leaving the oppressive humidity of the town which had the geographical disadvantage of being located at the base of an extensive and looming mountain range, picturesque though it was, into which, the heat of the day rushed headlong casting a confetti of irritable ions amongst the defenceless population. The other more exhilarating factor was the long flat stretch of road which by night was eternally shrouded in a cloak of eerie fog, clinging securely to the water canals and seeping out to hover over the lowlands of the dairy plains.

My partner in travel arrived first but had aged, with barely enough energy to illuminate the room of my adolescence with the most insipid tint of Naples yellow. Sleep must have come over my physically exhausted body, but the duration was doubtful and it took just a few abstract moments to realise that I was totally awake and still in the land of the living. An uneasiness was creeping in. I could feel it rolling in like the fogs on the flat lands. With it came fragments of events appearing as slowly dissolving visions from the past. Immobilised by exhaustion I allowed them to pass through me.

Although it appeared automatic for the majority, I was the worst at arithmetic tables and prayers and saw no earthly reason to memorise anything parrot fashion. The only possible solution of overcoming the situation was one of two alternatives.

Rarely I could cheat, and risk the sting of the short sharp cane, but I could always escape to the creek bed where I was familiar with the deep pools and the bogs of quicksand which were strategically placed along the tributary veins and lay in sinister wait. Their cool, gritty yet viscous matter instantly took you to the knees, thus by shock tactics immobilised you. Then at a decelerating pace, inched its way upward as you surrendered bit by bit. Until at some point the dank and commanding stuff released its grip momentarily while you writhed and squirmed endeavouring to escape. Being engulfed in the heavy yellow sand was the preferred option and I had no cognition of the fact that I might never get free of the suction.

If the leeches were there, waiting under cover in the sludgy clay, they would come for her as soon as we pushed her down to the edge and forced her to place her big toe into the opaque water. Whilst a sprinkle of salt would induce a foamy withdrawal it was a terrifying prospect to have your blood drained from you before you could reach dry salt.

That stretch of coastline was notorious for luring rock fishermen to precarious situations and occasionally one would slip or be taken by a wave. Otherwise, there was the odd naval vessel or aircraft exercise which went amiss and resulted in an unfortunate mishap and we the coastal residents would be asked to keep an eye out for bodies. We would actively seek out the sodden and damned evidence, and bundles of kelp can look remarkably like gleaming wet flesh, but just once we did happen upon a lifeless form wedged between rocks and our response was far less intrepid than our anticipation had been.

Sometimes I would join him in the little boat as it perilously skirted the bombora, thudded around the headland, then sit over the fantastic gardens of waving dark kelp, and with few words, perform the ritual exercise of dropping and retrieving wet lines from the deep. The water, like a mesmerising lullaby had a faint hollow sound as it resonated against our flimsy vessel. Tracts of the vast and moving satin of the ocean stretched out about us, acknowledgment of the vulnerability we shared. Occasionally we would spot whales on their southward journey along the corrugated horizon and scud after them in pursuit of a closer look.

It seemed ironic that despite the peculiar distinction of having webbed feet he could not swim to save his life. Yet this was never a deterrent to an insatiable sense of adventure, and as an accomplice I would be asked to keep many encounters secret from an over-anxious mother.

Only once did he come to grips with the ocean, but only left his tackle at the bottom and retained a much elongated sweater, testimony to the force by which he was dragged ashore.

By now I felt surrounded entirely by the mist and experienced an increasing sense of weight suspended above me, hovering, waiting for the right moment to lower itself onto me and I had no doubt, to weld me to the bed. A controlled calmness in the face of adversity was intermittently interrupted by spasms of panic. In an attempt to distract my thoughts and hopefully reticulate the eventual outcome, I generated light-hearted visions of normal and everyday memories. But these refused to linger long and were interrupted by further visions which overlaid the previous like a web, eventually obscuring them from existence.

A walk by the sea when she had leapt fully clothed into the water to avoid contact with a gleeful flasher.

The cries from a young girl caught in currents of the outgoing tide of the channel.

His punctured body left as debris on the shore for the newspaper photographers.

A last glimpse at his black hand as it went under for the final time to his sub-marine bed of fear.

The weight was increasing steadily and surely. I tried to fathom any connection between my immediate environment and the rationale for this experience. Pinned to the bed by some unseen force I was a rigid slab of block-ice heavy with the dread of death. Transfixed I scanned through a bank of memorable events which had occurred in that room and might logically have a significant effect on how I was feeling right now. I only needed to recall a few to realise that this looming weight was indeed the weight of memories, and they were not all frivolous. I lay with a fatal detachment while the images continued to flow past, unwinding before my passive eyes.

Rapid instinct told me to get every part of my body onto the board and then defy fear by adopting the poise of a basking lizard, attempting to camouflage itself in the face of a predator. I found the urge to look into its cold eye of surveillance compelling, especially as this meeting was not within the safe confines of an aquarium and I figured, if I'm going to go by way of the jaws of this beast of a considerable length, I might as well acknowledge its glance.

Probably it was only for ten minutes that it cruised its mighty bulk easily to and fro, shifting its position to take a more advantageous point of view from another angle, doubtless to assess if I might be a worthwhile kill, but it seemed to be hours. To allay my fear I spoke to it, in tender terms of endearment, or at least respect, but I dare not to let it hear less I offended it.

Not to distract it, I did not acknowledge the others on shore.

A compelling attraction drew me to this completely vertical rock face some two hundred feet above the seething, beckoning ocean. This was one of the two places where I could detach myself from realities and ponder the consequences of not belonging to that reality. Defiantly I could rebuke the Town Clerk's orders and dangle my legs over the precipice, tempting the forces to whisk me away to the ultramarine depths. The second site involved more anticipation as it took some effort and time to reach. Panting from the excited, frenzied dash, legs scratched and smarting from the low, dry scrub, I would part the curtain of bush then crawl along the draughty tunnel to where the ceiling was sufficiently high enough to stand. There I was all-powerful and indestructible, and could straddle the forty foot long and unimaginably deep fissure, see and feel the ceaseless updraught of the Pacific cut me in half. When satiated, I had the option of an easy climb to the right to lower you to the sloping fishing grounds, or, to the left, along the narrow and crumbling ledges as if a cockroach on the kitchen shelf, backs against the wall, watching you possible fate resounding far below.

It was all a matter of timing. You had to watch and count steadily as a few sets passed in order to discern the pattern. Then, after the fourth of the largest set,.....run. My companions had managed and were boisterously calling for blood. But the perverse ocean had changed its mind, and the dog and I were clutched away in its liquid fingers and pummelled about the jagged edges, fathoms of inky unknown beneath.

Another of those balmy days, the small bay dotted with swimmers and gulls. The tide now low in the afternoon washed around the central rock. I'd waded casually through

the chest deep water for some time but now my left foot was trapped. My captor lurking, ill-defined in the billowy clouds of sand in water. It was a tacky orifice, like stalactites of dried paint around the inner rim of a paint pot.

Feeling quite content in my horizontal state of resignation, I let the images wash over me and I savoured them.

There is the sanguine notion that water might unconditionally provide mesmerising and analgesic properties which may benefit my flagging nerves and emotions, (reflection being a psychological term). In exasperation, I may hope that something akin to the succour of a Freudian oceanic reverie might suffice. But there is also a compelling, escapist attraction to become enveloped by water and dissolve into its mass.

My assiduous return to site is symptomatic of an ambivalence occurring between the meditative and contemplative acts in the physical presence of water, and a compulsive, sado-masochistic, and cathartic act resembling a 'blood-letting'.

In the first instance, any therapeutic benefit or expectation of composure, which is certainly possible, suffers the threat of negation by an insistent and residual memory pertaining to events which involve water. This occurs from both a historic and personal viewpoint with reference to the specific site and to water generally.

The historical information relayed to me regarding the site at which I have made these photographs, is that it was a place which convict loggers of the Southern forests were ferried by on a daily basis. The place became one of trial and punishment, with the exemplars of fraudulent claims to portions of the required labour quotas of fellow convicts, being hung from the trees in full vision of the passing barges.

I have no intention of maximising the significance of the history of this particular site, because each and every place contains its own residual memory on a historic basis, and with the given information I may be interested from a social, political, historically informed position, and I may respond with humanitarian compassion and empathy, loathing or disgust. Whilst this aspect is present in my mind, it is not a prime concern. This learned knowledge merely taints the mood of the place, it does not create it.

This particular site in personal terms engenders a fluxus of memory and emotion which is constantly evolving so is not yet fixed in my own history. It is a location where a range of subjective experience occurs incorporating those of solitude, contentment, passivity and reverie, to frenetic, tumultuous events and emotions, and melancholy. It is precisely because of this range, or ambivalence, of experience and emotion, that both attraction and revulsion occur simultaneously.

Whilst water may have been a foundation for my work, it is not the literal 'absolute' of water that my investigation is about. Symbolically water represents the maternal entity and also the unconscious. It may be a medium for contemplation and it is implicated in becoming a catalyst for an ongoing state of reverie exchanging places with melancholy. Melancholy is a dark and solitary abyss in which we may seek refuge from the fearful world.

All the universe is gloomy, but precisely because we want to protect ourselves from its frightening and limitless monotony. We constitute any place as a corner.<sup>1</sup>

So, by constantly returning to a place, I am responding to a need to find an answer. The more I look and don't find, the greater the compulsion becomes and in the event that no answer comes; I am looking for that 'corner' in which to hide. In the absence of a child-like demand for the intervention of some magical and fortuitous revelation, I yearn for some place to objectify and dump my 'self'.

In reference to that yearning there exists an affinity born out of respect for water and a subsequent, relatively fearless attitude toward it. This enables the very alluring response of a compelling desire to be consumed. How appealing at times it is to dissolve oneself in the watery mass in the attempt to become depersonalised, to attain anonymity, to become a dipsomaniac of the hydra as did Narcissus who on seeing a diluted version of his 'self' which was so ungraspable and plunged into the water to unite with that illusive part of himself.

As I previously stated, the element water provides the medium for contemplation and reflection. Hegelian philosophy states that;

Water is the element of selfless contrast, it passively exists for others.<sup>2</sup>

He refers to water as the 'female', as the 'mother', and this feminising of the element water is reiterated by Bachelard;

Water is the most receptive of the elements, thus it has strongly female characteristics.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Sartre, J.P. The Emotions, p.87.

<sup>2</sup> Croutier, A.L. Taking The Waters, p.13.

<sup>3</sup> Bachelard, G. Water And Dreams, p.9.



If by some misfortune I have not satisfactorily separated from the mother, then water will be my surrogate mother.

It is an element with nourishing and nurturing properties, yet it also possesses the capacity to take life and this duality infers the simultaneous co-existence of opposites. - The ambivalent and internecine factors of which, says Bachelard;

Duality must exist for the imagination to be engaged: there must be a dual participation of desire and fear, a participation of good and evil. <sup>4</sup>

In relation to this dual participation of desire and fear, I place **vertigo** as being experienced on a personal and emotional level commonly enough, although probably not recognised as such, and located in the work of many.

In this paper I refer to a select few writers and artists whose work infers, is inadvertently concerned with, or is a direct response to issues relating to the psychological desire to metamorphose into otherness, or to loose oneself entirely. This I have compiled with a chronological order of the degree of psychological immersion in mind.

Vertigo is something other than the fear of falling. It is the voice of the emptiness below us which tempts and lures us, it is the desire to fall, against which, terrified, we defend ourselves. <sup>5</sup>

Commenting on the emptiness in the landscape in Caspar David Friedrich's; *Monk By The Sea*, Le Bris writes;

But here there is nothing - only emptiness, the silence of contemplation and that emotion which grips you then, religious in the true sense of the word, like a call from the infinite, or a homesick longing for it. <sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Bachelard, G. Water And Dreams. p.8.

<sup>5</sup> Kundera, M. The Unbearable Lightness Of Being. p.60.

<sup>6</sup> Le Bris, Michel.. Romantics And Romanticism. p.78.

This painting, quite literally suggests the domination of the monk, (being the most benevolent of mankind), by the regularity of vast emptiness of sea and sky, humble in the face of the creator. The relative insignificant, disproportionate entities of the solitary being, and the seemingly unknown and the unknowable, of which we are fearful.

Is the monk pondering along the Baudelairian lines?

That elsewhere, that yearned-for realm where it was supposed that a man might get rid of the burden of self, that land outside Space and Time, thought of as being at once a place of wandering and a place of homecoming.<sup>7</sup>

Le Bris elaborates on this isolation factor in Friedrich's landscapes and deems them to be in opposition to

places of reconciliation and calm plenitude, and representative of places of solitude and exile haunted by nostalgia for an elsewhere offering salvation.<sup>8</sup>

Edgar Allan Poe, like a faithful perennial, and in a most mesmerising and poetic way,, consistently displays an attraction toward the vortex of the unknown, and the subsequent descent into the void. In many of his stories one senses the inevitability and acceptance of an impending grim destiny. His psychological state was that of melancholy and the focus of his writing adheres and desires to remain inside the sombre cloak of melancholy. This passage from; *A Descent Into The Maelstrom* relays such a moment of resignation;

We were now in the belt of the surf that always surrounds the whirl; and I thought, of course, that another moment would plunge us into the abyss .....

It may appear strange, but now, when we in the very jaws of the gulf, I felt more composed than when we were only approaching it. Having made up my mind to hope no more, I got rid of a great deal of that terror which unmanned me at first, I suppose it was despair that strung my nerves. It may look like boasting-but what I tell you is truth- I began to reflect how magnificent a thing it was to die in such a manner, and how foolish it was in me to think of so paltry a consideration as my own individual life, in view of so wonderful a manifestation of God's power. I do believe that I blushed with shame when this idea crossed my mind.

After a while I became possessed with the keenest curiosity about the whirl itself. I positively felt a wish to explore its depths, even at the sacrifice I was going to make....<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Le Bris, Michel.. Romantics And Romanicism, p.161. (from Baudelaire's *Le Voyage*.)

<sup>8</sup> Ibid. p.80.

<sup>9</sup> Poe E.A. A Descent Into The Maelstrom, p.116.

Similarly expressing this desire of absorption are the photographic collaborations of Holger Trulzsch and Vera Lehndorff. In these images the subject, Lehndorff herself, has fused her own form with the surrounding environment, thus denying her prior existence as the ex-model Veruschka, and objectifying her 'person'. With the application of body paint she becomes camouflaged in the environment and the subsequent photographing of the scene forces an integration of the various three dimensions into the one flat surface of the photograph. Thus, by this fusion of her body whose prior identity as a model was for the camera, and whose present existence as a human is disguised as nature, Sontag suggests that she is committing a virtual suicide.

The desire to hide, to be camouflaged, to be elsewhere. Other.

The desire to punish the self. The desire to place no aim before that of gratifying it.

The desire to escape from a merely human appearance; to be an animal, not a person, an object (stone? wood? metal? cloth?), not a person; to be done with personhood.

The desire to dissolve the self into the world; the desire to reduce the world to matter, something one can inscribe oneself on, sink into, be saturated with.....

.....to become matter only, inorganic matter; to stop; to die.<sup>10</sup>

Photography is the perfect accomplice. The photograph is a document of that moment of her 'death'.

Although Mark Rothko alluded to the spirituality of religious experience, at times appearing to be a thinly disguised 'artist as hero' notion, his own psychological state was one of reverie plunging into severe depression.

His preference for the colour red as a carrier of emotion is not only generated by his own emotional response to that colour, but also stems from the more generally accepted primal associations with ritual, blood, fire, life and death. Red is synonymous with the colour of our origins and our interior of flesh and blood, is potent and intense; it may be joyful or sombre, frivolous or spiritual, but it is not necessarily passive.

Works from his later years were large surfaces of sensual, consuming, pulsating colour, watery formless spaces endowed with aura and inviting entry into his own sanctuary of reverie. Central to his painting were the Symbolist and Romantic traditions of tragic art culminating in the murals of the chapel in Houston.

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<sup>10</sup> Sontag, S. *Fragments Of An Esthetic Of Melancholy*, Art In America; Sept, 1986. p.116.

It is in these works that his painting reverberates with their "obsessions with murmuring silences".<sup>11</sup>

It is almost as though things have gone full circle from Friedrich's; 'Monk By The Sea', pondering his origin or his fate when Robert Hughes suggests that;

The pathos of his late work is often that of failure: the most ambitious example being the large chapel filled with gloomy, near-monochrome canvases.

The emptiness of this work is not the deliberate, polemic emptiness of Minimalism, but a sort of yearning for an epiphany that never comes.<sup>12</sup>

To peer into one of Anish Kapoor's large powder-pigment coated vessel of indeterminate depth and ambiguous internal dimensions, would not only be called to perceive the physical limits of the interior of the vessel, but to realise the scope of one's own imagination. Do I give it boundaries or allow it to absorb me?

If I were to stand at the edge of his dark circle on the floor, a more calculated and overt invitation exists.

The circle hovers between being perceived to be a flat, dense and well defined surface made by directly powder-coating pigment onto the floor as might be expected, and seeming to be a dark, seamless, and bottomless void. Here there is no umbilical cord of connection between surface and sub-surface as that which exists in his cone shaped floor pieces. One is left hovering between knowing and not knowing, between above and below, consciousness and unconsciousness, imagination and reason, with only the lure of the void compelling me to enter. The ambivalence of desire resounds.

There is an insidious aspect of this vertiginous state of desiring anonymity or oblivion, and that is the uncanny similarity to that of erotic desire. Physical, mental, and emotional similarities are evident and are inextricably linked by desire itself, or more so; to the consciousness of desire.

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<sup>11</sup> Ashton, Dore. About Rothko. p.125.

<sup>12</sup> Hughes, R. Nothing If Not Critical.- Mark Rothko In Babylon. p.238.

To place myself in a submissive and passive situation, to be subordinate, to allow myself to be overwhelmed, and to invite these situations willingly or even wilfully all involve a conscious decision.

Bataille muses on the aspect of eroticism;

.....I regarded eroticism as the disequilibrium in which the being consciously calls his own existence in question. In one sense, the being loses himself deliberately, but then the subject is identified with the object losing his identity. If necessary I can say in eroticism: I am losing myself. Not a privileged situation, no doubt. But the deliberate loss of self in eroticism is manifest,....<sup>13</sup>

Bataille may pronounce;

How sweet to enter filthy night and proudly wrap myself in it.<sup>14</sup>

While I say;

Like magic it's absorbed no evidence remains  
the last droplets of a former life mingle with the salty water  
That such a seemingly insignificant flow  
should give rise to the addiction that follows  
I know the perils and the dangers I know the delights  
Let go the lifeline and let me have just one more swim.

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<sup>13</sup> Bataille, G. Erotism- Death And Sensuality, p.31.

<sup>14</sup> Bataille, G. Guilty, p.13.

## DOCUMENTATION

Whilst I had initially wanted to envelope and involve the viewer in a virtual and ephemeral space, I found there were many physical restrictions associated the plan, but also, the progression of the imagery during the course dictated the final assembly.

My first stages of research were in the field of holography, which would have suited my leanings toward the construction of a more temporal and illusory space. After research which included a trip to Sydney to The Powerhouse Museum and to The Institute of Science and Technology, and hopefully to find a holographer, and further discussions with a science professor at University of Tasmania, I found the infrastructure involved in the manufacture of even a small hologram to be very involved. They were for me; prohibitively expensive, time consuming, and logistically unavailable to me here during the time span I had at my disposal.

The next option was to project still images onto a free-falling screen which would ideally have moved with the air flow of the exhibition space. Following tests with projected slides onto the large screen of the lecture theatre at the university, and discussions with the visiting artists; Fiona Hall and Rosalind Piggott, I found the response to the scale of the images more significant than their projection aspect.

As I worked through the selected images, the basis of their content and background was emerging as being more about stillness and silence and the 'weight of feelings'. Decisions regarding scale and mood gained more importance. They needed to be as impenetrable as my own obsessions with the subject and its motivation was being revealed to me.

Earlier images were insipid in colour and tone; a pinkish grey, mercuric-like .

There were also obvious references to the outside world with the inclusion of areas of the physical land jutting into the frame, forming a place from which to view the scene, or providing something substantial for the eye to rest upon. Such points of reference then were reflections of the surroundings and shadows, which in turn I chose to eliminate. Simultaneously the proximity of the viewer's eye to the surface was significant.

The colour had evolved from the earlier subdued tones to purple-reds and to brown-reds until the final deep red of stale wine or aged blood was in perfect synchronisation with the sense of impenetrability I was wishing to reproduce.

The constrictive nature of the photographic imagery represents the insular path of introspection and is a desire for emotional stillness. In its silence and stasis: (the still photograph), its impervious surface: (the flat photographic surface), and with a feeling of weighty mass and volume, (suggested by the colour and scale), it denies even Narcissus his reflection.

Whilst the physical and emotional connotations of submersion in the physical element of water are an important factor, the symbolism extends to encompass water as a void, or abyss of the unconscious, and this is the connecting thread between the photographs and the small paintings. The first shell images, I felt, were too readily associated with the context of water in itself, even though the manner in which I chose to paint and to present them was suggestive of the preciousness to which I was referring. These painted images are iconic representations of personal and conscious memory surfacing from the unconscious. My intention is that they function as small and precious points of reference, or; 'footnotes to the bigger picture' of the water photographs.

Throughout the course of making the water photographs, I was frequently compelled to put them away in order to avoid the confrontation of the obsession. The paintings became the necessary pills for the condition, in that they were an attempt to retrieve some sense of reality and 'self'. The American poet, Adrienne Rich, was attempting a similar thing in her poem; 'Diving into the Wreck'. I guess the paintings are some of the 'images of life' to which I am referring in the quote by Camus of the paper on melancholy.



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